Interview with Jack R. Perry

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR JACK R. PERRY

Interviewed by: Henry E. Mattox

Initial interview date: July 2, 1992

Q: This is an interview with Dr. Jack Perry, in his office at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina. Could I ask you, Jack, to give for the record some of the background on where you came from and your educational background and some of your professional experience before you went into the Foreign Service.

PERRY: I was born in 1930 in Atlanta, and went to public schools in Atlanta, and then I went to a Baptist college in Georgia called Mercer University, and graduated from there in 1951, and went into the Army during the Korean War. While I was in the Army, I was given a year of Russian language instruction at Monterey, which affected my career from then on. When I got out of the Army in 1954, I stayed in Atlanta for a year working for the Associated Press, and then went back to my alma mater for a year, in journalism. Then I went to graduate school at Columbia University, at the Russian Institute, and spent three years there. I worked towards my Ph.D. and got it all done but the dissertation, which I finally finished in 1972. And then I went into the Foreign Service in 1959.

Q: Okay, two questions about that, that we've gotten to so far. How did the Army choose you to go to Monterey? And, second, what was it that attracted you to a Foreign Service career?

PERRY: The first question about the Army is hard for me to answer—I don't know how the Army's mind works. I think that they had quotas. They were training people in Chinese and in Russian and other such languages for the Korean War. And the Army Security Agency, which I was recruited for (for the simple reason that they had a recruiting station in Atlanta), said, “If you want to go to language school for a year, sign up with us.” And then they gave me Russian; I didn't ask for it. It was more or less happenstance.

Q: You had not previously been interested in Russian language studies?

PERRY: No, never, nothing. And in my undergraduate days, I never had a course in political science or in anything international, to amount to anything. I was an English major.

Now for the second question: How did I get interested in the Foreign Service. By the time I had been through the Army, and had spent a year in Japan in the Army, and then came back home and worked for the Associated Press in Atlanta for a year, and had a little bit of a look at the world, I decided I wanted to go to graduate school. And graduate school in Soviet affairs at that time, which was the height of the Cold War, seemed a sensible thing to do. Once I got into the graduate program at Columbia, I was not particularly attracted to teaching, but was attracted to diplomatic things, and therefore decided to take the Foreign Service exam.

Q: Okay, to set the scene a little further, before we get down to the end of anything, I'll just note here that you're the director of the Dean Rusk Program in International Studies here at Davidson College, and you hold the rank of professor of political science. You've been here since retirement from the Foreign Service?

PERRY: I retired and went first to the Citadel in Charleston for three years, and then came here in 1985.

Q: You took the exam and obviously passed. You were commissioned an FSO in 1959, with a background in Russian studies.

Q: What was your first assignment, then, after FSI?

PERRY: My first assignment, to my astonishment, was the State Department. I had thought that everybody went overseas first, but back in those days, at least, not everybody did — because we got stuck in Washington for two years, living in a very inferior apartment which we had thought we were only going to be in for a few months. However, the job was great. My first assignment was the Soviet Exchanges Staff, which was created in 1957, I think, to follow up on the "spirit of Geneva." Our office handled cultural exchanges with the Russians. So my first two years I spent working in the Bureau of European Affairs on Soviet exchanges, a fascinating assignment.

Q: Give me an example of what you might do, what your office was responsible for.

PERRY: My boss for those two years was a very fine FSO named Frank Siscoe, who had already served in Moscow. Frank assigned me to cover, among other things, tourism. There was an effort then to increase tourism to the Soviet Union, and to try to get more Russians to come to the United States, which was, of course, a very different kettle of fish.

One of my fun endeavors was to escort a group of Soviet tourist experts around the United States, to places like Miami and Chicago and other places that Soviet tourists might be going. And, needless to say, that was a great learning experience.

Another fun time I had was when we were staging exhibits in the Soviet Union, and they were staging exhibits reciprocally in the United States. We were about to open a medical exhibit in Moscow, and they were about to open one Oklahoma City. The Soviets were not giving us the kind of facilities in Moscow we felt we had to have to stage a successful exhibit. So Frank Siscoe, my boss, being a pretty combative fellow, determined that, by God, if they weren't going to let us do it right, we weren't going to have the exhibit, and

we weren't going to let them open their exhibit in Oklahoma City. So he sent me out to Oklahoma City to stand in the door, as it were, and forbid the Russians from opening their exhibit. Well, it was sort of a nervous assignment, because the Oklahoma State Fair was going to feature this medical exhibit from the Soviet Union, and, needless to say, in those days (this was 1961, I suppose), there was a lot of excitement about Soviet exhibits. I literally had to go up to the tent and say, “You cannot open.” And since the State Department's not used to having that kind of power, I wasn't sure it would work. But, sure enough, it did work. And it turned out to be quite a pleasant time, because the people of Oklahoma City understood and they didn't blame us — and they took those Russian doctors (there was a whole gaggle of them with this exhibit) to their hearts. And so the Russian doctors had a wonderful time, because they were entertained by the doctors of Oklahoma City every night.

Q: Were we in a period of detente at that time?

PERRY: It's always hard to say exactly what was “a period of detente,” but I think you would say so. I can't remember the exact timing of this, but I believe it may have been in the last year of the Eisenhower administration or the first year of the Kennedy administration. At any rate, it was before the Cuban missile crisis, and therefore things were relatively good.

Q: With that kind of background and that kind of initial assignment, you were clearly on track for a Moscow assignment. According to my estimation, you went off in '62 as personnel officer.

PERRY: Yes, being personnel officer was a funny thing. The embassy in Moscow was trying to expand its number of officers who spoke Russian, because there were so many things to be done besides work in the office. Since all of our officers in Moscow who spoke Russian (and most of us did) could travel and could see the country in a way you couldn't in Moscow, they could potentially make contacts with the Russians and all the rest of it,

so they were trying to expand the staff. And they came up the idea of adding that year a personnel officer and an assistant GSO (General Services Officer), both of whom were youngish, junior Russian speakers. So I felt lucky to get the job.

It was a very tedious job. I kept the leave cards and planned people's travel and other 'personnelly' type things for a year before I got promoted (I guess it's a promotion) to the Political Section.

But the interesting thing about it, I think, is that the Soviets seemed to think that my job was a CIA position. I guess to them personnel seemed a little bit sensitive, and they seemed to think that I might be CIA. And they treated me with a great deal of attention. The surveillance that I got (and my wife, too, who got even more than I did) was very strong.

There was a Yale professor, Frederick Barghoorn (this was the second year of the Kennedy administration), who was more or less kidnaped by the Russians on the streets of Moscow, and it was quite a cause c#l#bre at the time. I was told by my friends who had access to the information that the Soviets asked Barghoorn repeatedly about me and what I did at the embassy. Well, Barghoorn had never heard of me or seen me, and I was nothing to him, so he couldn't give them any answer. But I took that as a sort of a gratifying sign that the Soviets must think I was much more important than I was.

Q: You had been in Army Intelligence, though.

PERRY: Well, not really. I was in the Army Security Agency, which was electronic intercept stuff. And very low level, at that.

Q: But as far as the KGB would be concerned...

PERRY: Well, they probably thought so. They probably did.

Q: Well, I don't know. I'm just sort of fishing here.

PERRY: Probably true, yes. They may have put that together. In any event, they were wrong. For me, “personnel” meant leave cards, not spying.

Q: Did you find that you had, in the two years...I assume it was exactly two years you were in Moscow...

PERRY: Just about, yes.

Q: Did you find that the stresses and strains and tensions got to you, as many people have said about their tours during those times?

PERRY: I don't think so. My wife and I (two of our four children had been born at that time) had a very pleasant time. We remember Moscow most pleasantly.

There were certain things that happened, that all the old Moscow hands of those days know went on—the surveillance, the wiretaps, even the microwaving of the embassy (which caused us some nervousness later when we found out about it). Those things went on, and it was not a particularly pleasant atmosphere, but the excitement of it and the knowledge that you were doing something really fascinating and important buoyed one up. To serve in Moscow in the early sixties was a privilege and an enjoyment as well, even if the Cold War atmosphere did close in about you at times.

I would also say that the spirit at the embassy in those days was really very good. We were close to each other. If the Foreign Service ever had a post, it seems to me, where people were fond of each other and enjoyed each other's company and formed a very warm little colony, it was Moscow in the early sixties.

You have to remember that we went through some trying times. We were there for the Cuban missile crisis. We were there for Kennedy's assassination. And we were there for

some spy-trial stuff that caused a great deal of surveillance at the embassy — Penkovsky, the Soviet colonel who was spying for the United States, was arrested while we were there. And the Penkovsky incident caused a lot of us to be declared persona non grata (not me, thank God), and just sort of stirred things up greatly.

But I guess I would have to say that all in all we found service in Moscow most exciting and most agreeable.

Q: Well, I'm quite prepared to believe that, but you were there, according to the list of things that you have just laid out, during some very tension-filled times, the Cuban missile crisis, perhaps, above all. Did you notice at the time, then, a perceptible tightening-down of surveillance or other kinds of harassment?

PERRY: Well, the Cuban missile crisis was an especially interesting time. Needless to say, I was just about the most junior officer at the embassy, and I had no real idea of what was going on. I mean, I wasn't privy to the cables. I know that the cars would go dashing over towards the Soviet Foreign Ministry with messages, and we'd see them go, but I didn't know what was in those messages.

It's hard to document this, but the feeling that my wife and I and our friends felt was that the Russian people were, by and large, trying to show us Americans that they were our friends and that they did not want war. In a general way, this has always been true. Whenever I've been in the Soviet Union (I have, of course, visited many times), most Russians like Americans and they've generally tried to show it. But during the Cuban missile crisis, I think that we felt a particularly strong feeling that the Russians were trying to communicate to us, in any way they could, that, gosh, we don't want war, and we have nothing against you.

To give you an example of how you felt this a little bit “in the air,” we had a performing arts attraction that was touring the Soviet Union at the time. As I recall, it was the Shaw Chorale. They had been touring for some time before the Cuban missile crisis, and they

were having a successful tour, but not an overwhelming tour. And then all of a sudden the Cuban missile crisis came, and they started getting these tumultuous ovations that would last for ten minutes or so. The embassy officers who were traveling with them (they were out in the boondocks) would call us up and say, “We don't know what's going on; all of a sudden these people have become well loved.” And so our explanation for this is that the Russians were trying to show this American group: “We love you. We don't want to fight you; we love you.” Well, one never knows about those things.

It was a somewhat tense time, there's no doubt about that. And the Russians did send mobs outside the embassy.

One of the experiences I'll never forget is that our next-door neighbors in our apartments, which were quite some miles from the embassy, had a governess, whom they had brought with them from British Guiana (now Guyana; then British Guiana). She was very religious, and she had been told that the Russians were atheists, and therefore she was somewhat fearful, and she wouldn't leave the apartment. And our friends, the Woods, kept saying, “You really must go out and enjoy life a little bit.” So, about this time, they had lined up some tickets to go the Bolshoi Ballet, on a Saturday afternoon. They picked the worst possible time, because it was the day that the Russians decided to demonstrate about the Cuban missile crisis. They loaded the governess in the car with their children and the two of them, and they had to come by the embassy to pick up their tickets. And, of course, they drove straight into this mob of several thousand howling Russians. They were able to get out of the car, and all of us at the embassy were taken upstairs to the Marine apartment, which was on the top floor, that being considered the safest place, because people were throwing bottles at the embassy, and so forth. This poor woman from Guiana sat there and trembled for a couple of hours, and after that, I think she more or less refused to leave the apartment.

This riot, by the way, was the time that has become rather famous because an officer from the embassy went outside and mingled with the crowd and asked somebody, “How long

do you think this will last?" And the guy looked at his watch and said, "It's going to be over in twenty-two minutes."

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

PERRY: Well, when we first went to Moscow, in the summer, it was Tommy Thompson. Llewellyn Thompson was there on his first tour, and then he went back later. But he left soon after we got there, and the new ambassador was Foy Kohler, who then stayed several years.

Q: And the DCM?

PERRY: The DCM was Jack McSweeney, our first year. The second year, it was Walter Stoessel. And Mac Toon was political counselor. So we had a pretty strong team; with Kohler, Stoessel, and Toon, it was quite a lineup.

Q: Stoessel, rather shockingly and unexpectedly, died not long ago.

PERRY: Right. In fact, among old Moscow hands, when we get together, one always brings up things like that —the early deaths of so many of us — and I suppose this is a phenomenon you would expect. But it was documented that the embassy was bombarded with microwaves for a long time by the Soviets. And we always compare notes as to how many of our colleagues died of cancer. And, to us, it always seems that there were large numbers that did so. But, of course, there are large numbers of people everywhere who die of cancer. I will say that Walter was exposed to an awful lot of those microwaves, because the ambassador's office was right up on the top floor, where it was probably pretty bad. So who knows.

Q: Let's move on to Paris. You were at the NATO mission and then you were at the embassy. And you were there five years, all the time as a political officer. I guess you'd call this mid-level by this time.

PERRY: I guess so. Yes.

Q: What were some of your duties there?

PERRY: Well, at NATO, which was then at Port Dauphine, as you know, in Paris, I was on the international staff. I was not in the U.S. delegation; I was on the international staff, and I was supposed to be the Soviet watcher, I suppose you could say. A fascinating time to be there, because I reported for duty in July, and in October, Khrushchev fell. And, of course, the fall of Khrushchev was one of the biggest things in Soviet affairs for a long time.

I remember very well that there was another fellow on the international staff, whose name was Pierre Cerles, a Frenchman who had served in Moscow not too long before I had. And as soon as Khrushchev was ousted, he took it upon himself to write a memorandum to the secretary general of NATO, because I think he thought he really knew the Soviets much better than I did. It wasn't his job, but he did it, saying that Khrushchev was ousted because of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Well, I wrote my memorandum to the secretary general, saying Khrushchev was ousted for a whole bunch of reasons, including his personality and lots of other things, but it wasn't simply the Sino-Soviet conflict. So I remember the secretary general, Mr. Manlio Brosio, a very wonderful Italian gentleman, who said he had never had two expert reports that were so different. But he took them both and submitted them to the council, and we went on from there.

That was a very interesting assignment at NATO for two years.

Q: And then you moved over to the embassy?

PERRY: Yes, what happened in the spring of 1966 is that De Gaulle, who was then president of France, declared war, in a political sense, on NATO and on the United States, and decided that France would be better off more independent. And so he took France

out of the integrated military part of the alliance. And it became very clear that NATO headquarters should move, which they announced that they would do right away.

By the way, the recollection that I will never erase of those days is that De Gaulle was having a press conference, which, of course, everyone always watched with bated breath, and it was in the air that he might do something about NATO, so we all went. Of course, De Gaulle spoke in these wonderful phrases that simply rolled out.

Q: I remember very well watching him in the late fifties on the television. It was like listening to Moses making pronouncements.

PERRY: Exactly. He just gave out some of the greatest French sentences you'll ever hear. Well, I was not probably the best French speaker in the world, but I was all right by then, and I had sensitive political antennae, and it was very clear to me that he had just said that's the end of it with NATO—to hell with NATO, as it were. And as we walked out, I remember there was a young diplomat from another country, and I'm not even sure what country it was, but he just simply said to me, “Well, there was nothing in that press conference, was there.” He had missed the point.

At any rate, when NATO decided it would leave Paris, I decided I would leave NATO, and I was fortunate enough to be offered a job in the Political Section at the embassy. Charles Bohlen was our ambassador, and had a great interest in Soviet affairs at the embassy, of course. And so I went down and took the job of sort of the Communist watcher in the Political Section.

Q: And you were there for what, four...

PERRY: Three years.

Q: Let's get a little bit operational now. Bohlen was the ambassador, who was the political counselor?

PERRY: It was Richard Funkhouser.

Q: You had the Communist Desk, in a sense. Who were some of your colleagues, if you can recall?

PERRY: I can remember some of them. John Gunther Dean covered Asia. Peter Sebastian covered Africa. Bob Oakley covered, as I recall, the Middle East; maybe it was South Asia. Peter Semler came along and worked on Germany and Europe. We had Richard Long. Some of these people came and went, of course. Maynard Glitman, who went on to a very successful career in the arms control and military field. But it was a very good bunch; a number went on to be ambassadors.

Well, of course, working for Chip Bohlen, for someone like myself who had been in Soviet affairs by then for a pretty long time was a great privilege. For me, Chip Bohlen was and is the best diplomat that I ever ran across. I had the greatest respect for him and for his wife, Avis. I couldn't have asked for a better boss, and he knew the Russians so well that it was a real joy to be around him.

Now during my time in Paris, the way these things happen, Charles Bohlen's tenure ran out and Sarge Shriver came in as his replacement. President Johnson named Shriver. That was my first experience with a political ambassador, and that was quite a different kind of show. It was a totally different embassy, and the Kennedy family style of operation made things really hop.

So I sometimes think that I had two tours at the embassy in Paris: one under Bohlen and one under Shriver.

Q: Yes. Well, that's interesting that you say that Bohlen was the diplomat par excellence as far as you were concerned. Could you tell us, for the record now and for whoever might

be reading this in years to come, what it was about Bohlen, how it is that you formed this assessment of him.

PERRY: Well, a lot has been written about Chip, and I know in that book The Wise Men, for example, he figures very largely, partly because he represented, I suppose, a whole generation of diplomats. But if you talk about Soviet experts in the American Foreign Service, then surely Bohlen, Kennan, and Llewellyn Thompson would be mentioned by most people as the three greatest. Bohlen was a bona fide Soviet expert, in that he had lived there, he had studied Russia deeply, he spoke Russian really well. He was a marvelous linguist. His French was beautiful to hear, and his Russian I assume was; I never got to hear him speak Russian. But aside from his knowledge, his expertness when it came to Soviet affairs and Russian affairs, he was, of course, a cultivated man. He understood the European mind—the French mind, the European mind—I think, as well as anyone. When Charles Bohlen sat after dinner and talked to the French foreign minister, he was able, intellectually, to hold his own, I think, with any Frenchman—in French, which not too many Americans can do, as you well know. Whenever I think of Chip, I think of that wonderful phrase that they applied to Ben Johnson: “O rare Ben Jonson.” Chip was a rare personality, in that he had a zest for life and a wit that came across as with few other people that I have ever known. A marvelous, marvelous man. When he had his final staff meeting at the embassy, his final words were, “Well, at least you can say I didn't put any cigarettes out in the soup.” And that was sort of typical Bohlen.

Q: When did he leave? In what year, roughly?

PERRY: It was either '67 or '68.

Q: Did you ever have personal contact with George Kennan?

PERRY: I just heard him speak and have met him, but no, unfortunately, I never served with him. I had lots of friends that did, but I didn't.

Q: What is the assessment of your friends of Kennan as a diplomat?

PERRY: Well, the things is, George Kennan could write better than most of the rest of us put together. He was and is a marvelous master of the English language, and people always said that when Kennan wrote a telegram to Washington, no matter what he was arguing, you'd be persuaded because the English was just so overwhelming. I don't think that was true of Chip Bohlen, for example, although he wrote beautifully, but he was not the persuasive master that Kennan was. Some people felt — and I don't like to criticize Kennan because he's one of my heroes in many ways — but as a diplomat, some people said that he had a certain messianic complex, that he really felt that he was called to be the one that knew everything and did everything. I don't know whether that's true or not, but it certainly may have entered into the way he departed Moscow, because he was declared persona non grata and so forth.

Q: One reason I raise the question is because I just read the book George Kennan, Cold War Iconoclast, by Hixson, who takes a fairly negative view of Kennan, granting him that he writes beautifully and that he was a great raconteur and he was a bone fide Soviet expert and so on and so forth, but Hixson apparently doesn't like him and says words to the effect that he's a prima donna and that he changed his mind every time the wind blew in different directions. Anyway, I just wondered.

PERRY: I've heard some of that, but I must say, if you look at his writings, particularly right after the war—the long telegram and the X article and so on—what diplomat do we know that could compare with the effect he had on history? Now you might go back and say, Was he always right? I'm sure he wasn't.

I was a bit of a dove. I mean, I was a detentenik; I believed in better relations with the Russians. Now that the Cold War is over, you might go back and look at people like me and say, Were they right or were they wrong? Towards the end, in Washington, I remained friends with Bohlen. He would come by the Soviet Desk, where I was then serving, and

talk about what was going on in Russia. And I remember we had some differences, because I felt that he was somewhat too ideological in his view of the Soviets, feeling that they were ideologically motivated, which I always doubted, frankly. But, on balance, as far as Bohlen is concerned, he was called a Cold Warrior, but I think most of all he and Kennan both were people that knew the Russians, as a culture, as a civilization, as a people, and that's what gave them their great strength.

Q: Well, that's fascinating, not particularly, though, on your career, but on people that you knew. And I think that kind of comment will be of interest for some of our readers.

PERRY: One thing I was so fortunate in, I did work for a number of really big people and very interesting people. Working for Chip Bohlen, for me, was sort of like instant history. I mean, Chip had been there; he was at Yalta, and you could ask him, What was Stalin like? and so forth, and this was fascinating. I remember one time I asked for an appointment with him, even though I was on his staff, and I took about an hour of his time, and I said, “Mr. Ambassador, I want to ask you about Yalta, and I'd like for you just to talk to me about it.” I interviewed him, as it were, for about an hour, and I took notes. I've never done anything with those notes; I hope someday I'll find time to. But this was talking to history.

Q: You went off from Paris and dealing with people like Bohlen and these other really very talented officers, and you went back to Washington for an advanced schooling assignment. What was it exactly?

PERRY: I spent a year at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), in Washington. I had very few responsibilities and was able, thank God, to finish my dissertation, so that I finally got my Ph.D., and just had a year's breather, which was very nice.

Q: What was your topic?

PERRY: They topic of my dissertation was: Soviet Policy towards French North Africa. To my knowledge, no one has ever read it; even my advisors I don't think ever read it. But it did its purpose, it got me the degree and made me learn how to do research, so it was okay.

Q: Someone once told me, in that regard: Dissertations are not to be read; they're to be written.

PERRY: That's true.

Q: It is just a hurdle to show that you can find your way around in the stacks in the archives. After SAIS, you were in the Department?

PERRY: Yes, Soviet Desk.

Q: Were you what was called then, I guess perhaps still is, desk officer, or office director, or what?

PERRY: No, I wasn't that high. I was the head of one part of the Soviet Desk, which was Multilateral Affairs, which means that we dealt with Soviet foreign policy. The Bilateral part of it dealt with U.S.-Soviet relations, and so they got all of the exciting stuff about when somebody was arrested, or when we were going to build a new embassy, or all those bilateral things. Whereas we occupied ourselves with foreign policy.

I was on the Soviet Desk from 1970 to 1972, and my first boss was Spike Dubs (Adolph Dubs), who was later kidnaped and murdered in Afghanistan. Spike was one of the great Foreign Service officers of my time, I think, and, I've always felt, was a martyr. A wonderful man to work for. I had served briefly with him in Moscow, so I knew him. He was great.

Then Spike left after my first year on the Soviet Desk, and my next boss was Jack Matlock. Jack and I had served together in Moscow, and in fact I took my first major Soviet trip as

an embassy officer with Jack, and we went to the Baltic States, to Riga and Tallinn and Vilnius, and that was wonderful. Jack was my boss, then, for a year before I moved on.

So I was very fortunate in my bosses on the Soviet Desk.

Q: And he was later ambassador.

PERRY: He served in Moscow four times and then he was the last ambassador to the Soviet Union. I'm happy to say, Jack is going to come down and speak for me at a conference in November. He's a Duke graduate, you know.

Q: From 1972 to 1974 you were special assistant to the Director of the Council on Environmental Quality.

PERRY: Yes, that was an out-of-service assignment, or whatever you call them, and I think in many ways was the most pleasant assignment I ever had, certainly in the United States. I was never that enamored of Foggy Bottom; I never felt at home in the State Department. This was at the Council on Environmental Quality, which was, and is part of the Executive Office of the President. It was physically located on Lafayette Square, across the street from the White House. My boss, and the chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, was Russell Train, who went on to be head of the Environmental Protection Agency, and then, when he retired from that, became the American head of the World Wildlife Fund—really sort of Mr. Environment. That was a great assignment. And Russ was a splendid boss.

Q: What on earth was an FSO doing on that council?

PERRY: Well, in the spring of 1972, Richard Nixon went to Moscow and had his first summit with Brezhnev and signed several agreements. One of the many agreements that were signed by Nixon there was an environmental cooperation agreement. I played a small part in helping prepare for that signing, and then Russ Train and the Council were

given the job of implementing this agreement, and so I was sent over to help them make this Soviet-American agreement work. I did some other things, too, especially international things, but a lot of what I did the two years I was at the Council had to do with U.S.-Soviet relations. We went on a trip to Moscow in the fall, soon after I joined the Council, and negotiated the agreement that really filled out the umbrella that had been signed by Nixon. We traveled all over the Soviet Union, went out to Lake Baikal and had just a fascinating trip, and then came back and tried to make the thing work. Those were the high tide days both of detente and of the environmental movement.

Q: Were you the only FSO in the office?

PERRY: No, there was one other FSO named Otty Hane, who was also working on international things.

Q: Well, do you know, I think I'm going to call a pause here, because your next three assignments were at a senior level, all overseas again, so I think it's fairly logical point to stop for the moment. The next time we meet, with your permission, we'll go over them, and I'll have some sort of general wrap-up questions I'd like to ask you. Now is there anything that I've forgotten to ask, that you think you would like to speak to on the initial part of this interview?

PERRY: No, you know, old FSO's can always dredge up anecdotes about anything, but I don't have anything special I want to tell you.

Q: Okay, we'll call this the end of part one of this particular interview.

Q: It's October 27, 1992. We're at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and I'm continuing the second part of an interview with Jack R. Perry. Now, Jack, to continue the second part of this conversation, we dropped you off before you went off to Prague and Stockholm and Sofia and so forth. We were talking about your experiences as a Soviet hand, your experiences in Moscow and the people that you had known, and your experience on the

Soviet Desk. But then, after that period, let's say, picking up about 1974 in your career, you went off as DCM in Prague. Who was the ambassador then?

PERRY: We had a sort of a strange situation. Shortly before I got there, Bud Sherer (Albert Sherer), a wonderful man, had been named to go over to Geneva for the CSCE talks. But he was not taken away from his ambassadorship, he was just sort of sent over to Geneva, and he would come back to Prague about once a month for a weekend. So, within a couple of weeks after I had arrived, I was charg# d'affaires. And I stayed charg#, except for these occasional monthly weekend visits, for about a year or a little more. Then the CSCE talks were finished, Bud Sherer went off on another assignment, and they didn't send an ambassador to Prague for another year. So I was charg# then for just about a year, until the summer of 1976, when they did send an ambassador. And then I left. So I was charg# most of the two years in Prague.

Q: Why was the Department so slow in assigning an ambassador?

PERRY: That's a good question. I was never totally sure. Maybe there was a struggle going on as to whether it would be a career person or non-career or something, but I never got the inside story.

Q: Well, after you had been there virtually two years as charg#, it would be normal practice to shuffle you on off, with a new ambassador coming in, with a little overlap, perhaps. But a new ambassador would have to have his own way prepared or opened for him, and someone who had been charg# for two years would almost have to leave. Did you get that impression? Did anyone say that explicitly to you, the fact that we're going to put you through?

PERRY: I don't remember anyone saying it explicitly, but I had very good friends in Personnel, like Arthur Wortzel, and it was just understood from the beginning that I would leave when the ambassador came. We were working on an assignment for me during the spring. I went up to Stockholm to interview with the new ambassador up there, David

Smith, and he invited me to come as DCM. So it all sort of worked out. And my wife and I had the joy of two 4th of July celebrations that year. We went to the one in Prague, so we could say goodbye to everybody and introduce people to the new ambassador, on the 4th, and then after the reception, which was midday, we got on the plane and flew to Stockholm, and then they had theirs up there the next day. So by the end of that week we were pretty well basket cases.

The 4th of July in Prague was, in those bad old days of the Russian occupation, really a big event, because a lot of Czechs could come to the embassy that day, whereas they couldn't have any contact with us the rest of the year. So you had people like alumni of American colleges and universities, and you had veterans who had fought with us in World War II, and all kinds of people who used to be part of the American sort of milieu there in Czechoslovakia who could come. We would have, as I recall, a couple of thousand people. It was a mob, and a very pleasant occasion.

Q: During the two years that you were charg#, did you have any issues or problems arise that still linger in your mind?

PERRY: It was a time — the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of 1968 — when not much was going on. As a matter of fact, when we talk about why they didn't send an ambassador the second year, I think one good reason is that it was a very dull, dead period. The Soviet occupation had left us without much to say to the Czechs. And although when you're at an embassy, you always try to make things work and get things going and sign agreements and one thing and another, it was rather hard in that period to put too much push into it. I suppose the main thing that we were trying to do was get some trade going, with trade shows and that sort of thing, but that went nowhere.

We had one issue that was a burning issue (which in retrospect is very small potatoes, except it had a moral side to it), and that is that we had come into possession of all the Czech gold that had been taken out of Czechoslovakia by Hitler when he took over there

at the start of the Second World War. That gold had been in American possession, and I think the British had a little of it, but we had most of it for a long time. And the Czechs had been trying, quite legitimately, to get it back. I mean, they were Communists, but it was still Czechoslovak gold and they should have had it. But we drove a very tough bargain and wanted to get a lot in exchange for giving them their gold back, which I always felt was a sort of a questionable moral enterprise, but that's what we did. And so I spent a fair amount of time trying to talk about that sort of thing.

About the only other issue that I remember that was a lively one is that I had the idea that it would be nice to celebrate the American part in the liberation of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia from the Germans. While the Russians came sweeping through Slovakia, we Americans, under Patton, went rolling into Bohemia and could have gone easily to Prague, but decided to hold back and let the Russians do that. Patton set up a headquarters near Pilsen, and there were lots of Americans killed liberating the Czech lands. And so we were able to get more attention paid to that, which I thought was a nice thing to do.

I probably carried it too far, because we got USIA to write a really nice brochure, with illustrations and so forth, all in Czech, which was sort of a celebration of the American role in liberating Czechoslovakia. Well, of course, that was anathema to the Russians; they didn't want to hear that at all. And it was therefore anathema to the Czech government. But we issued that brochure and started handing it out. And, of course, I was called in for a protest, and the Czechs got terribly upset about that. So, after a while, we had to quit distributing it, because it was causing too many problems. But it got around in good quantity. I was proud of it.

Q: What was their objection?

PERRY: Their objection was that it was propaganda, and that the real liberation of Czechoslovakia came from the Russians and not from us. They distorted history.

Q: You dealt with the Czech government officials; you didn't deal directly with Russian officials while there?

PERRY: No, except that the Soviet Embassy had some pretty intelligent people there, people that we could occasionally talk to, although not about what was going on in Czechoslovakia; they wouldn't talk about that. But it was a certain dialogue about what was going on in the world. Otherwise, no, we dealt with the Czechs as if they were a totally sovereign nation. Of course, they weren't totally sovereign what with all those Soviet troops there and the rest of it. But that was the way that we (and they) acted. And I had occasion, as charg#, to meet all of the top Czech officials. Hus#k was then the head of the Party and the head of the government, and I had a number of occasions to meet him and other people. But, of course, as you would imagine, we didn't have that much high-level stuff going on. We didn't have really high-level visitors, nor did they go to the U.S. So we dealt mostly with our colleagues in the Foreign Ministry at a working level.

Q: You would deal with the foreign minister, as charg#, or the deputy foreign minister, or who exactly?

PERRY: I had some contact with all of them. Prague is not that big a place, and there were times when I would see the foreign minister, or some of his deputies. Some of the deputy foreign ministers I talked to a good deal. But it was the head of the American section that we dealt with the most from day to day.

Q: Then you went to Sweden, and the ambassador was Strausz-Hup#.

PERRY: No, he had just left, just before. It was a gentleman named David Smith, who was a Republican appointee and a Washington lawyer, who served really only about a year, because you had, then, in 1976, the Ford-Carter election, and so he was invited to leave after those elections, and a new Democratic ambassador came in, Rodney Kennedy-Minott.

Q: Kennedy-Minott, who was from Cal State. Did you just stay on?

PERRY: I just stayed on. There never seemed to be much talk about my leaving. Rodney and I got along quite well, as I did with David Smith, I will say. They were both very pleasant.

Rodney and his wife had been among the first Californians to get on the Carter bandwagon. They had given breakfasts for Carter when he was still unknown in California. Don't ask me why, except I will say (I remember this, being a Southerner myself) that Rodney was a great fan of the South. He was a historian and thought it would be a great thing to have a Southern president again—bring the South back into the mainstream and so forth. At any rate, he and his wife were part of the Carter team early on, and he was particularly close to Hamilton Jordan; I think they were pretty good friends. And so he got named. He and I hit it off well. I had been charg# for several months, between ambassadors, so when he came, it was natural for me to take him around and introduce him and all that.

Q: I think it might have been natural for him to seek his own man as DCM..

PERRY: I think once Rodney found out that I could be a friend and that I wasn't trying to do him in in any way but was trying to help him, we got along quite well. I really liked him and still like him, and I liked his wife a great deal; she was a very classy person. They had some fine traits.

Like many non-career ambassadors, he tended (and so did David Smith, and so had others I had worked with before) not to take diplomatic protocol and courtesies as seriously as we career people did. And so I had trouble getting him and his predecessor to make courtesy calls on other ambassadors and so forth. And it bothered me, because they would come up to me at a party and say, “Your ambassador's been here X months and he hasn't been to see me yet.” And I'd say, “Well, I'm sure he's coming soon.”

Q: “He hasn't even dropped cards on me.”

PERRY: Exactly.

Q: Did you still have at that time embassy officers dropping cards on the ambassador when he arrived?

PERRY: No, I think, at least in Stockholm and other places that I served, it had pretty well faded by then. We did that when I first went into the Foreign Service, and we did it in our earlier posts, in Moscow and in Paris, but then somehow it withered away.

Q: I remember very well being required to do it at my early posts, too. It struck me as quite unusual, but you go along with it.

PERRY: Sure, and those cards cost a fortune to a junior officer. Every time I turned around I was buying two hundred new cards.

There are two things about Sweden that stick in my mind particularly. One is what a lovely place it was to serve. I mean, I honestly fell very much in love with Sweden, considered it a second homeland, and have always thought that, if I could afford it, I'd love to live there, at least part of the year. Just a lovely place. And the second thing is that we came not long after the Vietnam War — when you think about it, we got there in 1976, and Swedish-American relations had been really sour. I mean, you know how the Swedes had been holier than everybody on Vietnam, and wouldn't speak to us very much, and we had had a lot of trouble, although we did have an ambassador there during the Vietnam War named Holland, who was a political appointee. He had enormous respect for the Swedes, as did they for him. I never heard, in my two years in Sweden, anything but the utmost praise for him and how he served during the Vietnam War with dignity and all the rest of it. But what was peculiar was that by the time we got there, in 1976, not long after the Vietnam War at all, the Swedes were quite ready to forget Vietnam and to start improving relations with the

United States, almost overnight. And so I was there in sort of a halcyon period when we had no serious problems with the Swedes; everything was good.

The Social Democrats got voted out of office while we were there, for the first time in thirty-odd years, and what they called the bourgeois parties came in for a couple of years. So that was an unusual period, too. But it made serving there, I must say, an enormous pleasure. I had friends on both sides of the political spectrum, and liked and respected them all.

I think the second day that I was in Stockholm, one of the embassy officers took me over to the Foreign Ministry and took me around and introduced me to everybody except the foreign minister. (I didn't meet him that day, but I met everybody else that mattered.) And every one of them was a first name—it was “Jack” this and “Leif” that and all the rest of it. And for two years, I was on a first-name basis with everybody that mattered in foreign policy in Sweden, and it was such an enjoyment. And they all spoke better English than I did, so it was great.

Q: Well, you were afflicted with a Georgia accent, but I imagine you knew all the words.

PERRY: I knew the words.

Q: Was there any particular reason why they were being so forthcoming?

PERRY: Well, I think Sweden, of course, could benefit from association with the United States in all kinds of ways—military and diplomatic and all the rest of it. They wanted to be closer to us. And the shadow of the Russian bear was a pretty dark shadow at that time.

We had a bit of a setback while I was there. I always thought that it was an unfortunate decision. Just as an example of the kind of thing that was going on, they were trying to sell their fighter aircraft, the Viggen, to India. A lot of the components of it were American components, and therefore we had a veto on whom they could sell it to. And we didn't

want them to sell it to the Indians. This was during the Carter administration, and it went against our, I guess we would have called it, human rights policy, or our arms escalation policy. I think the idea was, if they got it, then the Pakistanis would notch-up their fighter and so forth; it would escalate the danger. The fact was, if they didn't buy the Swedish plane, they were going to buy a French plane, which was every bit as good. And so that was one of those times when we at the Embassy really fought and did our best with Washington to get them to see that this was a case where it would hurt nothing and it would help the Swedes a whole heck of a lot. But we lost it. I think Cy Vance, who was then secretary of state, decided that one himself, and I'm sure he had good reasons for it. But that's the sort of thing that we got into.

Another thing that I remember about service in Stockholm, that, since you're an old FSO, would amuse you, I suspect: the relationship between the ambassador and CIA was very interesting at this time.

And that was because, under the former ambassador, Strausz Hup#, there had been one of those rare times when CIA blossomed into the press. They had recruited in Stockholm an African (I think he was Kenyan, but I'm not sure; it was before my time, of course), and they were going to use him as a source. And after a little while, he blew the whistle on them and went public. It was very embarrassing to Strausz Hup# and to the embassy that we Americans were out recruiting Africans on Swedish soil to spy for the CIA. So it left a bad taste in everybody's mouth.

And so the new ambassador, David Smith, was almost fanatical that he didn't want to be embarrassed by CIA. And, since he was new to diplomacy and really didn't know much about how to do this, he asked me, as his DCM, to sort of take hold of CIA in Stockholm and make sure he wasn't blindsided.

Q: That's easier said than done.

PERRY: Easier said than done, to make sure that he knew everything that CIA was doing.

Well, there was an acting station chief, who, as a matter of fact, I had known in Moscow and who was a very decent chap, who, I suspect, came relatively clean with us. At any rate, we went down to the secure room (the Tank) and met, quite a few times, and he went through, he told us, every case that they had going in Sweden, by name...well, maybe not every one by name, most of them by name, who it was, what was going on, the whole story, so that the ambassador would not be surprised or upset by anything that should happen. And the commitment was made that they would keep on with this kind of openness with the ambassador.

Well, I'm not in a position to say how much they told us. And the new station chief, when he came in, was much more of an old-line CIA type that didn't like this thing at all; this openness was really anathema to him. So we had a lot of conflict then, and I suspect that we were never told as much as we thought we were.

But, for me, it was a very interesting experience, trying to get CIA to tell us everything they were doing in Stockholm. It was fascinating.

Q: Well, this will be of interest not only to me, as you remarked, but to the historian, the student of diplomatic affairs, who reads the transcript of these tapes some day. Were you reasonably satisfied that you were seeing all of the outgoing from the station?

PERRY: I was never satisfied about that, because, as you well know, most of the communicators at the embassies I've worked in were CIA, or at least a lot of them were, and I just never felt that we were seeing all the messages — although the ambassador asserted his right to see everything that was going out. And I know, in some embassies, ambassadors, by God, succeeded in doing that. I don't think we did, partly because, you see, the ambassador was using me as his voice, and it was hard for me to talk as tough

as a career ambassador could have talked. So I'm not satisfied that we saw everything. Or knew everything.

Q: Were you reasonably satisfied that you were privy to the information in all of their caseloads, in all of their futzing about in the...?

PERRY: Well, I guess, being a Soviet type in the Foreign Service, I had an awful lot of dealings with CIA, particularly the analysts' side, the open side. I always had great admiration for the analysts who were covering Soviet affairs, and I thought they had some very good people, of a relatively liberal bent, if I may use that word 'liberal' in a nonpolitical sense. But I always had great hesitations about the non-open side, about the operational side. And, although I had some friends who were in there, I always thought that they never told us everything. In Stockholm, and also, I will say, when I was charg# in Prague, I had very good relations with the CIA people, but I'm not at all sure that they told everything.

Stockholm was an interesting place because it was a center of terrorism—terrorism in a sense that the Swedes were notably lax on cracking down on terrorism, especially until they had had a couple of incidents themselves.

Q: That was as self-protection, perhaps?

PERRY: I think it may have been. Remember, I got there soon before Prime Minister Olaf Palme was ousted from office, although he came back after my time. I think that the Social Democrats might have just been a little more willing to put up with some things than some other governments in Europe were.

But at any rate, CIA considered that they were somewhat coddling terrorists and letting them take a free R&R in Stockholm and then go out and do their dirty work elsewhere. I don't know how true that was; I'm not enough of an expert, and I wasn't inside enough to know.

But what it did mean is that the work that CIA did in Stockholm, on the terrorist side particularly, was important. And that was an era, in the seventies, when there was a lot of ugly terrorist stuff going on, some really bad incidents, in Europe particularly. And so CIA did have some cases that they were running that were potentially of great value. Whether they told all of them to the ambassador or not, I really don't know.

Q: Well, I for one was never totally sure that I even knew the real names of my colleagues I was serving with abroad.

PERRY: How could you be sure.

Q: Let me ask you a slightly different question. Were there any American exiles still around, those who had fled the war, the draft and such?

PERRY: There were, and I would occasionally hear a little bit about them. President Ford made his offer of amnesty while I was there, but at that time, so soon after the war, people didn't just flock to take advantage of that offer. As I recall, it was extended again later. There were some there, but the embassy heard of them and got involved with them, during my time at least, rather little.

Q: You spent two years in Stockholm, and you enjoyed it, and you would retire in Stockholm if you could, even though it's dark all day long sometimes.

PERRY: It's dark and cold, that's true.

Q: Even though the suicide rate, allegedly, anyway, is very high. Then you went off to Sofia.

PERRY: Well, I went home for a brief thing first. I was deputy executive secretary of the state department for a year. The reason that I mention that is, that was, in a way, the most interesting assignment I had, because I worked very closely with Cy Vance, whom

I admire greatly as a really a major, impressive figure. He reminded me always of an ancient Roman senator. I mean, he was really an upright man, in the best sense of the word. And I think what he's done since he left as secretary of state bears that out. He has really been a man who has done great good in the world. After all, he was one of the very few people who resigned as secretary of state over an issue of conscience. I admire him a great deal, and I enjoyed working for him immensely.

Q: This is not my interview, but I'll make a comment here. There's a type—the Eastern establishment internationalist and intellectual, and Vance is perhaps an excellent personification of the type.

PERRY: I think he is. Being from Georgia myself, and therefore having a certain rapport with some of the Carter staff people, and knowing the people over on Brzezinski's staff very well, I felt a little bit as if I could see both sides of the famous Vance versus Brzezinski quarrel.

But I will have to say, in retrospect, when I was deputy executive secretary, Peter Tarnoff was executive secretary, and Frank Wisner was the other deputy, so the three of us were the ones who were running the executive secretariat—Peter especially, of course. Peter was very close to Mr. Vance and was really part of a little Mafia operation there that was really running the State DepartmenReally first-rate people—Les Gelb and Tony Lake and Bill Maynes and Peter and a few others, really good people. Good people whether you agreed with all of their politics or not, and I happened to agree.

But Mr. Vance was caught in an unpleasant situation, in which Brzezinski played a large role. I've always found it hard to forgive this totally. Zbig is a brilliant man, one of the most brilliant men that has been in foreign affairs in this country, I think. And yet he didn't play the game by the rules that he should have, it seems to me, as national security advisor. And it made it just terribly difficult for Mr. Vance. I was only there for a year in that job and

would be the last person to claim that I had any special insights, but it seems to me that Mr. Vance was in a very, very difficult position.

His conscience was such that, during the three years that he was secretary of state, he got there in the office before almost anybody else in the building; he left usually among the last (he didn't go to parties and cocktails and things like that); and he was in every weekend, as far as I know. I'm sure he must have taken one weekend off during his secretaryship, but they were very rare. I was many years younger, but he worked himself so hard that I couldn't keep up at all; he wore me out and I think those who were closer around him than I.

But I remember particularly, as an example of his conscience, a terrible time when we were going to Mexico with the president, when Carter was making a state visit to Mexico. And just at this time, some of our Foreign Service people were taken hostage. If I'm not confusing the incidents, I'm pretty sure it was about this time that my old friend and colleague Spike Dubs was taken prisoner and was murdered, actually, in Kabul. I remember that Mr. Vance was so hurt by that incident and felt so strongly that he had lost a friend and one of his people, that you could see it etched on his face. And I remember when we got to Mexico, I think that particular day some hostages had been taken elsewhere, and I think it was in Pakistan, I think that was the time. (It was before the hostages were taken at the embassy in Tehran). But, at any rate, he had been up for about two nights, worrying about these various things, Spike Dubs's murder and these hostages and so forth, and his face was somewhat grey. And I remember talking to Mr. Vance with Arnie Raphel, who was later ambassador to Pakistan and also, alas, was murdered, or the plane crashed and he was killed. Arnie was Vance's personal aide, and Arnie and I were talking to him, trying to persuade him not to go to the state dinner that night, because he was so tired it looked as if he was about to fall on his face. But he would not hear of it. I mean, he said, “Oh, no, I have to be there.” So he went, and did without sleep another night.

Mr. Vance was a tremendously impressive man, both his mind and his character, and I stand in great respect for him.

Q: That kind of comment, too, will be of great interest to those who read these transcripts, sooner or later, one of these days. Tell me, briefly, what does the deputy executive secretary of the department do?

PERRY: Well, the S/S, or the Executive Secretariat, is the paper-pushing enterprise on the Seventh Floor that funnels all of the flow of paper from the Department to the secretary and back, into the other principals, but especially the secretary. The executive secretary is the guy really responsible for the fusion of the secretary of state and the rest of the building.

And I must say here that I feel something very strongly, that I'm sure historians will be investigating and writing about for years, but we've had two different types of secretaries of state in my lifetime. There were those who used the building, who used the Foreign Service, who used the floors under them, and those who didn't. And the ones who did especially, it seems to me, for some reason, were mostly Democrats. I don't think it has anything to do with the party, but it just works that way, in history, for some reason. But I think Mr. Rusk was one who used the building, and I think Mr. Vance was, preeminently. Some others as well, but those two especially. Whereas those who did not use the building and were famous for being hermits up on the Seventh Floor and relying on a handful of chosen people and not telling the rest of the building what was going on were Kissinger and Baker, preeminent among those. I don't think Shultz was so much that way, and you could name others, but I think Kissinger and Baker were. Well, as a Foreign Service officer, I feel that's a damn shame, because we've got this great body of expertness, as you well know, and willingness to serve, and when one is cut out by the secretary of state as if one's work didn't matter, then it hurts, and I don't think that you get the best foreign policy that way, either.

Q: Well, it's a waste, I think.

PERRY: A great waste. Great waste.

But, at any rate, Mr. Vance was one who used the building, so your question: What did the executive secretary do? I'm not sure that the same answer would obtain for the Baker time or the Kissinger time, not nearly as much. But I think Mr. Vance did use the building, and Peter Tarnoff and Frank Wisner and I were the ones who would call up the assistant secretary or his staff member and would say, “The secretary needs a briefing paper on this. He's going to lunch with the president Friday; he's got to have a paper on this,” and so forth. And then it all flowed in and out; we were drowned in paper, of course.

Q: Did you also have to do the logistical arrangements for a trip abroad, for example?

PERRY: Well, we did a lot of it. During my time there, there were four or five. During the one year I was there, there were several big ones. Usually you got a lot of help from Protocol and from the regional bureau in charge, like ARA for the Mexico trip and so forth, but we in S/S did a fair amount of that.

And also we were responsible for all of the secret traffic and all of the high-level CIA papers that came in—all the stuff that was “Eyes-only” and all that, that was a rather big responsibility.

Another responsibility that I think is important is that we prepared “the evening reading.” Every president does it differently, but during the Carter administration there was something called “the evening reading,” which was supposed to be a first-person thing from Vance to Carter. I think when the administration started, it probably was largely first person, but time ran out for Mr. Vance to write the thing, and so it became less personal. But it was very high level, and we in the Executive Secretariat really wrote that thing every night, with a lot of help from people around the building. Now this was not the INR (Intelligence and Research) briefing; that was good, too, but this was “what's happened

today that the secretary of state wants the president to know about." And it was a very important medium for reaching Mr. Carter on foreign affairs. It would come back every day with little scrawls from Carter, saying "okay," or "do this," or "do that," and one of our jobs was to scan that thing, and if there were decisions, to pass them down.

Allied to that was — once again, every president had his own version of this — the Friday lunch. Carter had a "Friday lunch" with the secretary of state and, sometimes, I think, the vice president and secretary of defense, sometimes the head of CIA and so forth, and Brzezinski, the NSC advisor. And our job was to prepare for Mr. Vance the agenda and the briefing papers for that lunch, an important task.

I remember those luncheon things so well because Mr. Vance struggled mightily, the year that I was working there, to get things like Third-World debt and environmental issues and issues like that on the agenda. And invariably we would have these marvelous papers on these broad subjects like that, that would come from the building, problems that just needed to be brought to the president's attention—long-range problems, environmental problems and that sort of thing. And every Friday, invariably, there would be so many crises that they would get bumped. And they would get bumped time and time again. And so you put the Iranian hostages first, and then you put threatened war in the Middle East, and all the rest of it, and the long-range problems never got looked at. And I have a feeling that that's the story of how it operates.

Q: Still today, probably.

PERRY: Still today.

Q: Do you know how you got chosen to go to Sofia, Bulgaria?

PERRY: I think so. Being chosen as deputy executive secretary was a sign that there was some confidence in me and that I had good friends who were in fairly influential places. When I went to State, I told Peter that, on the advice of my predecessor, David Anderson,

who went off as ambassador to Yugoslavia, a year in S/S would probably be enough. And Peter was kind enough to agree to that. I think, by the time a year was over, I was worn out, and he was glad that I had finished my year and he could get somebody else in there anyway. It was a hard year, and I'm not so sure that I was as well cut out for that as people like Peter Tarnoff and Frank Wisner, who, I must say, had lightning-fast minds and whom I respected a great deal. They could do the policy-decision process in a way that I'm not sure I was cut out for. I think I was much better at an embassy than I was in the State Department. At any rate, a year was enough.

When there was going to be a meeting to decide ambassadors, the three of us—Peter, Frank, and I—would meet before, and we would have the list, and we would discuss the State Department people that would go up. Now, of course, we knew nothing about the politicos that were coming from the other side that would go directly to the White House. But we did know who in Personnel they were putting up for ambassador, and we had some voice in it. Peter Tarnoff particularly had a big voice, and we sort of advised him; we would occasionally know people that he wouldn't know. I'm not saying that he went against Personnel, but he was able to influence largely what Personnel did.

And so I guess that with my Soviet background and having been DCM at a couple of posts and charg# a good deal and all of that, it was considered that I was old enough for the thing. And so what was available? Well, Bulgaria was available. EUR (the European Bureau) was always my home bureau, and it's where I'd served all of my posts, and so it was natural that that's where I would find an ambassadorship if I found one. And I could claim a little experience in communist countries.

I remember that Harry Barnes, who was then director general, said, “Jack, don't go to Bulgaria. Wait and get something bigger and better.” Because that was probably, I guess, maybe except for Malta, the last and the least of the European ambassadorial posts. But I said to myself, and I said to my wife, and I said to Harry, “You know, Washington is a

funny place. One never knows what will happen about these things, and six months from now I may be dead or something."

Q: Or you may have blotted your copybook.

PERRY: Exactly. So I said, "Listen, if I have a chance at Bulgaria, I'm going to take it." And I did. And I've never been sorry.

Q: Jack, I hate to say this, but I think we're going to have to schedule a third meeting somewhere along the line, because there is a certain amount of time that these things are useful and there's a certain amount of tape that runs out, believe it or not. So I would just as soon hold, if you don't mind, a couple of overview questions that I'd like to ask you, and a survey of your service in Sofia. I'd like to hold it for a little later. There's an unusual opportunity here, I think, for you to be able to compare and contrast service with political ambassadors, because you had two or three in a row there.

PERRY: I had Sarge Shriver in Paris, too. That was educational.

Q: Even though these were relatively small posts, you had, at least a couple of them there, political appointee ambassadors, and then almost, not quite, almost immediately you go off, as a careerist yourself, as an ambassador, and a certain number of years have passed, so you're able to see with some objectivity the advantages and the disadvantages that the two types of fish of ambassadors have been. I'd like to pursue that a little bit at another time.

PERRY: It's a good subject. I would also be glad to have an opportunity, if you decide that you have the time to ask me, to talk a little bit about Dean Rusk, because since leaving the Foreign Service, mostly, I have had a great deal of contact with him, and it would be fun to talk a little bit about it, especially as compared with Cy Vance.

Q: That would be, I think, invaluable for the future historian. These tapes, as you know, are destined for the perusal of future historians, historians perhaps a generation from now, ten to twenty years from now or whatever, and so those of us who have some direct knowledge of historic figures, such as Dean Rusk, especially, who really, for the young historian nowadays, I suppose, seems like ancient history, it would be really quite unusual to have a chance to get your views on that. Would you please remind me about that when we talk again?

PERRY: Sure, okay. I will.

Q: My mind is like a steel sieve.

PERRY: I like to talk about Dean Rusk, because he's one of my heroes, so I will be glad to.

Q: This particular cassette I'm going to send in for transcription, because it takes quite a while anyway, as I understand it, but with the understanding that we're going to hit another tape somewhere along the line.

PERRY: Sure. It will give me an excuse to come back up to Chapel Hill.

Q: Very good. I appreciate your time. We will just call it quits at this point, and we'll pick up again on another date.

PERRY: Great. Thanks to you.

End of interview